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THE ABCs OF SEO – Search Engine Optimization

By Joanne Glasspoole

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If you want to be found in the search engines, it is important that you add search engine optimization to your action list. In a nutshell, search engine optimization—or SEO for short—is the process of making your web pages "search engine friendly."

SEO is a relatively new marketing industry. Although there are many purported experts, most of us who call ourselves SEO specialists are learning. The search engines are constantly in flux, so SEO techniques that worked yesterday may not necessarily work tomorrow. As a result, it is exceedingly important to keep up with the fervent pace of the Internet, and the search engines in particular.

One of the frustrations of search engine placement is that your rankings are constantly fluctuating. The key to a successful search engine optimization campaign is creativity, perseverance and practice, practice, practice. Do not try to fool the search engines by "tricking" them with unsavory techniques (e.g., keyword stuffing, cloaking, hidden text) because you will risk having your web site lose favor with the search engines, or worse, getting banned altogether.

If you are developing a new web site or redesigning an old one, now is a good time to think about search engine optimization. This article will describe the process of optimizing your web pages for the search engines, as well as highlight some of the other components that are important for a successful search engine marketing campaign.

WRITING KEYWORD-RICH WEB COPY

I'm sure you've heard the old cliché: Content is king. Well, you know what, it is! Although the Internet is graphic-rich, it is a text-based medium. Information is what your visitors are seeking. If your web site doesn't present the information they want, don't forget your competitor's web site is only one mouse click away.

Search engines need copy to know what your web site's theme is and how your site should be indexed in their directory. If your home page consists solely of a Flash movie or an image map,

there will be nothing for the search engines to index. Flash is cool, but it is not so cool when your web site doesn't come up in search engine results.

So, how do you write keyword-rich copy?

The first thing you need to do is identify the keyword phrases that are important and relevant to your web site. For instance, how would you describe your company, products and services? More importantly, how would your visitors describe your company, products and services? Although the answer may seem like a no-brainer, it really isn't, because you need to think outside of the box. You need to get into your visitor's head and think like your visitor. What search terms would they use to find your web site?

A good place to start your keyword research is by looking at your log files. What search terms are your visitors using to find you? Armed with this information, you can begin researching the popularity of those terms. Researching your keywords is a very important task, because if you target the wrong terms, your traffic will suffer. Although your site may rank number one for some obscure term, if no one is searching for that term, your site will not be found in the search engines.

There are a number of handy tools available online to help you begin building your list of relevant keywords. Overture (formerly Goto.com) offers a Search Term Suggestion Tool on its web site that will not only tell you how many times a particular keyword phrase was queried in the past month, it'll also present you with a list of alternative terms to consider for your search engine optimization campaign.

<http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/>

In addition to utilizing keyword suggestion tools to research your keywords, I highly recommend brainstorming keywords with your co-workers, employees, friends and family members. Better yet, ask your clients and customers what terms they would use to search for your web site. Brainstorming keywords will teach you a lot about how others think and use the Internet to find information.

Once you have identified your keywords, you will need to integrate them into the body of your web page. Your sentences need to be intelligible and grammatically correct. Don't forget: Your web copy will be read by human beings, as well as the search engines. If your web copy doesn't make sense, your visitors will hit their back button never to return again. Bad web copy will defeat the whole purpose of your search engine

optimization campaign.

WRITING YOUR META TAGS

The most important tag in the header section of your web page is the title tag. The title tag is displayed in the bar at the top of your browser window—above the toolbar. Many webmasters do not use the title tag properly. For example, their page will be titled "Home" or "Welcome," or worse yet "untitled," because they don't include a title at all. The search engines place a lot of relevance on the words contained within the title tag, so be sure to include your targeted keyword phrases when writing your title tag. This tag is generally limited to 60 characters, so choose your words with care.

The next important tag in the header section is the description meta tag. This tag is used to describe your web page. Like the title tag, many of the search engines will extrapolate this information to summarize your web site. Again, be sure to include your targeted keyword phrases.

The third and least important tag in the header section is the keywords meta tag. Because of abuse by unscrupulous webmasters, the keywords tag is ignored by many of the search engines. Even so, some do use it, so it doesn't hurt to include it. Like your title and description tag, choose your keywords carefully. Do not include keywords that are not included in the body of your

web copy or irrelevant to the theme of your site.

LINK POPULARITY

Much is said about link popularity, but what is it exactly?

A few years ago, people were joining "link farms" to increase their link popularity, but today that is frowned upon and can actually be detrimental to your quest for higher rankings in the search engines. Now the emphasis is more on the quality of the links pointing to your web site versus the quantity.

Many of the major search engines use link popularity to gauge the relevancy of your site in its search results. Plus, links are what makes the web go-round. Many webmasters have the notion that links are bad because they are sending visitors off of their web site. Although this is true, links to and from web sites that complement yours helps to build credibility and sets the stage for making your web site an authority in your field.

Much is written about the importance of getting links from directories like Yahoo!, Looksmart and the Open Directory

Project, because they are reviewed by human beings. If you want a link in the first two, however, it will cost you money. A listing in Yahoo! and Looksmart is considered "paid inclusion." Your marketing dollars will be well spent, though, because listings here will not only generate increased traffic, it will add greatly to your web site's link popularity.

SUBMITTING TO THE SEARCH ENGINES

Once your web page is fully optimized, it is time to submit it to the search engines. Although there are hundreds of search engines on the Internet, only a handful are truly important. Recent statistics show the top three search engines as:

- #1 MSN
- #2 Yahoo!
- #3 Google

Although there are automated services that promise to get you listed on thousands of search engines, it is recommended that you manually submit your site to the top search engines. Some of the search engines view automated submissions as spam and will

not list your site. Others put a higher priority on manual submissions. And others—such as Inktomi—required an annual fee to list your site. It can take weeks (sometimes even months!) to get listed, so again, be patient. The search engines are important to the success of your web site, so treat them with the respect they deserve. Most of all, do not over-submit!

For more information about search engine submissions, request a copy of my article "Web Site Promotion 101" at <mailto:sitepromotion101@sendfree.com>

TRAFFIC REPORTING AND ANALYSIS

Once you have allowed an appropriate amount of time to lapse (I usually wait six weeks), it is time to generate some reports to confirm the success of your search engine optimization campaign. Search engine positioning reports provide a wealth of information, such as your site's position in the major search engines, how you rank on your targeted keyword terms and phrases, which sites rank above and below you, where you've declined in rankings, and so on.

To automate the process of generating your search engine positioning reports, download a free trial of 1stPlace Software's highly-acclaimed WebPosition Gold at <http://www.webposition.com/>

In addition to your search engine positioning reports, be sure to regularly check your traffic logs. Is your traffic increasing? Are people finding your site with the search terms you targeted? Which of the search engines are referring visitors to your site?

There are many variables that affect rankings, including:

1. Keyword density
2. Link popularity
3. Click popularity
4. Keywords in the title
5. Keywords in the description tag
6. Keywords in the keywords tag
7. Keywords in the names of linked pages and in the linked words
8. Keywords in the alt tags
9. Keywords in names of images

10. Paying for ranks

11. Listing in online directories

Source: Search Engine Optimization and Placement: An Internet Marketing Course for Webmasters by Renee Kennedy and Terry Kent.
<http://www.thewritemarket.com/seo-book.shtml>

CASE STUDY OF GRIEF LOSS & RECOVERY

In October 2001, my web site, Grief Loss & Recovery (<http://www.grieflossrecovery.com>), was averaging 98 visitors a day and 573 page views. Reviewing my traffic logs, I noted that the most popular search term for my site was "grief poems," so I decided to optimize my site for that phrase.

Since October, my traffic has steadily climbed the charts.

In March 2002, my daily unique visitors averaged 325 and my page views 1962, an increase of 69 percent and 70 percent, respectively.

With regard to my rankings in the search engines, they have also improved considerably. For example, for the search phrase "grief poems" in Google, my site ranks number one out of 102,000 results; and for the search term "grief," my site ranks 15 out of 1,690,000.

As for traffic referred by the search engines, Google far exceeds all other search engines in driving traffic to my site with 2,953 referrals in March, followed by Yahoo at 1,428. (In comparison, my October 2001 numbers showed Yahoo referring 535

visitors and Google 423.)

All-in-all, I am pleased with the results of my first attempt at optimizing Grief Loss & Recovery and am beginning to note similar results with some of the other web sites I have recently optimized.

When playing the search engine optimization game, patience is important, because results do not happen overnight.

CONCLUSION

To be competitive online, your web site needs to be search

engine friendly. Search engine optimization is a function of Internet marketing and is the most cost-effective means of marketing to your target audience. With an estimated 84 percent of web users turning to the search engines to find information online, it is important that your site rank within the top 30 results if you want to be found. A successful search engine optimization campaign will not only boost your rankings in the search engines, it will bring qualified customers and prospects to your web site who are already on the web searching for your products and services.

For more information about search engine optimization and positioning, visit:

Search Engine Watch

<http://www.searchenginewatch.com/>

Search Engine World

<http://www.searchengineworld.com/index.htm>

Academy of Web Specialists

<http://www.academywebspecialists.com/>

Spider Food

<http://www.spider-food.net/>

Plus be sure to subscribe to:

Adventive I-Search

<http://www.adventive.com/lists/isearch/summary.html>

Joanne Glasspoole is the editor/publisher of CYBER QUEST. Each issue is jam packed with original reports, news briefs, cool Webmaster tools, and more. To subscribe, send email to Majordomo@lists.kdv.com with "subscribe cyberquest" in the body of your message. Visit Joanne's

web site at <http://www.glasspoole.com>

What Makes For Ethical Search Engine Optimization Tactics?

By Gabriel Adams

If you've hung around in the search engine optimization industry (a.k.a. SEO industry) very long, you've probably heard the debate on ethical SEO tactics. Or, as it is often put, white hat tactics versus black hat tactics.

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What exactly makes a search engine optimization tactic ethical or unethical? According to the dictionary, an ethical practice is one "conforming to accepted standards of social or professional behavior". For search engine optimization, I believe that we should get at least some of the "accepted standards" from the search engines themselves.

Some SEO experts would interject that the search engines don't want search engine optimizers to exist at all, so if we ask the search engines, all search engine optimization is unethical. That's not true, though. Google itself says that "Many SEOs provide useful services for website owners...However, a few unethical SEOs have given the industry a black eye."

So...what makes an unethical SEO? Once again, Google has an opinion on the subject: "Avoid tricks ...to improve search engine rankings. A good rule of thumb is whether you'd feel comfortable explaining what you've done to a website that competes with you."

Perhaps a better way to put it would be this: You've gotten a phone call from Sam, who is a Google search results quality enforcement officer. He says: "John, I see that you are ranked #1 on the keyword xyz. I want to be sure that you did this in an ethical manner. What methods did you use?" If you feel comfortable telling Google how you got top ranked, then you're probably OK.

Of course, those are only general guidelines. Read the Google and Yahoo webmaster guidelines. You'll find many specifics. You'll also find that the golden rule of ethical search engine optimization is: "Don't do anything to trick the search engines, or to represent your pages differently to the search engines than you do your human visitors."

Visit the David Williams Corporation for your Ethical Search Engine Optimization needs!



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